THE CHANGES IN KIPLING'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE HOME ENGLISH, 1882-1903

BY

DONALD LOUIS HILL

A.B., Hartwick College, 1937
A.M., Syracuse University, 1939

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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IN THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
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Kipling's constantly changing attitude toward the character of the Home English and toward the condition of England in the 1890's is an object of study which suggests a number of difficult questions to the student. This study proposes to trace the steps between the intense hostility which Kipling showed toward the Home English about the beginning of the decade and the uneasy but permanent reconciliation with them which he came to about the time of the Boer War. The period within the limits of the investigation is treated chronologically in four stages: (1) that of Kipling's close identification with the Anglo-Indian community and of his acceptance of its ideals and convictions; (2) that of his extreme hostility toward London and the Home English during the period of his residence in London; (3) that of his divided allegiance and reconsideration in America; and (4) that of his final settlement in England. An attempt is made to characterize each stage and to give a coherent account of the motives which led from one to another. The evidence used in the study is drawn from Kipling's published writings as they appear in the "Burwash Edition" of his works and from the various published writings about Kipling which are available to all scholars. Although letters would obviously be of great assistance in a study of this kind, there are no published collections of Kipling's letters, and this study makes no use of unpublished materials.

Since Home English interests were felt to be in certain respects at variance with, or even in conflict with, those of the Anglo-Indian community, the degree of Kipling's identification with Anglo-India enters into the consideration of his attitude toward the Home English. During the years 1882 to 1889, Kipling came to identify himself very closely with the Anglo-Indian community, by and large accepting its values and espousing its interests. On the question of the proper

role of the British in India, he adopted the views of local administrative officials, not those of men high in the Government of India; he was therefore opposed to the "progressive movement," which had as its goal the increase of native voice in the government and, ultimately, native self-rule. Kipling believed with most members of the Anglo-Indian community that the natives would never be able to rule themselves competently, and he considered efforts to fit them for self-rule to be serious threats to good government in India. The immediate responsibility for the "progressive movement" he assigned to Liberal influence within the Government of India; the ultimate responsibility he laid at the door of parliament and the secretary of state at Home. At the time when he left India, he was fully aware of the important differences between the convictions of Anglo-Indians and those of the Home English in regard to the government of India; and, as a loyal member of the Anglo-Indian community, he was eager to take the Anglo-Indian side of the controversy in London.

From 1889 to 1892, the period of his residence in London, he judged London and the Home English from the point of view of a confirmed Anglo-Indian. His sense of alienation in London and his homesickness for Anglo-India were the two most insistent motives of his London period. He did not become reconciled to London, still less assimilated to it, but felt a burning contempt for almost every aspect of London life which came under his observation. Compared with the local administrator in India who embodied Kipling's ideals, the typical upper-class Londoner showed, in Kipling's opinion, serious deficiencies of training and character: he was ignorant of life's harsher realities; he lived complacently in sheltered idleness; he was incapable of effective practical action; he was vain, trivial, and irresponsible. Other classes in London gave Kipling no more reason for encouragement as he measured their potential value to the nation: the working classes, he believed, were interested in their rights rather than in their obligations; the slum-dwellers and the roving mobs in the streets he considered positively dangerous to civil order. In

an effort to turn public opinion against certain proposals for Indian self-rule then being considered in parliament, he wrote several elaborate tracts which urged the wisdom of leaving the Indian question to the Government of India and to the discretion of experienced Anglo-Indian officials. The Home English he held to be incapable of managing the Empire effectively because of (1) their ignorance of its needs; (2) their rotten softness and their complacent aversion to warfare; (3) their obstinate but mistaken humanitarianism; (4) the political opportunism of members of parliament; and (5) the unrest, disunity, and lawlessness among all classes in England. Kipling's attitude toward reviewers and critics of his work was as hostile as his attitude toward upper-class London in general. Nevertheless, his work was overwhelmingly well received from the very first; it cannot be held that his rise to fame was slow nor that it was in any important degree retarded by the hostility of reviewers and critics. During 1891, however, an increasingly large proportion of the published commentary on his work was unfavorable. It is likely that this growing critical coolness made him feel more than ever an alien in London and made easier his decision to leave England early in 1892. In the study of Kipling's attitude toward London, *The Light that Failed* is an especially valuable document, for it is essentially Kipling's attempt to interpret and to evaluate his own experience in London up to the latter part of 1890. The book is more thoroughly autobiographical than has previously been recognized; wherever it is not a record, moreover, it is a "wish fulfillment," and its later chapters constitute Kipling's symbolic departure from London. *The Naulahka* is significant in a different way as a celebration of American vitality and promise at the expense of the English. The book marks the lowest point in Kipling's estimate of English (including Anglo-Indian) fitness to do great work in the world, and it marks the highest point of his faith in America. Kipling settled in America in 1892 chiefly because he suspected that England's day of powerfully constructive activity was over and because he hoped to find in America a people who conformed more closely to his ideals

than did the Home English.

At the time of his settlement in America Kipling was fascinated by the "American spirit." But whatever enthusiasm he felt for the "American spirit" was overbalanced during his American residence by his disgust with contemporary American life as it came under his direct observation. He appreciated the promise of America and he respected some aspects of America's past, but he never came to accept the America of the 1890's as his own country. He was repelled by its lawlessness, its disorder, and its lack of responsible centralized control; its public life he found undignified and corrupt; its private life narrow and empty. In general, his writings during this period show a preference for a society with a stronger central authority than the American, with a higher degree of co-ordination, and with a more rigid system of ranks and classes. His direct criticisms of America often imply that England was not open to the same objections; his social ideals, whatever their merits, were more fully realized in England than in America. The contempt which he had felt during his London period for the elements of decadence in English life weakened during his American residence, and his confidence in England steadily rose. The life of the English country gentleman began to appeal to him strongly, and as he became more and more absorbed in the prospect of a military test of the British nation, his interest in living in England increased. The logical end of this gradual development would have been his return to England, even without the stimulus of his quarrel with Beatty Balestier. Edmund Wilson's claim that Kipling's quarrel with Balestier produced a sudden change in Kipling's emotional allegiances is unfounded; by 1896 Kipling had already gone far in the direction of reconciliation with England. The Balestier episode no doubt hastened his departure from America, but it did not change the direction of his development in any important respect. The whole American period was one of gradually increasing sympathy with England and of consistently harsh criticism of America.

The major turning point in Kipling's life was not the Balestier episode, but the Boer War. During the period before the war, both in England and in America, he grew more and more confident of England's military power and more and more eagar to see it put to the test. He tried to give a sense of this power in his writings, to justify England's use of it, and to define some of the obligations incumbent upon her as the mightiest nation on earth. In his exaggerated confidence he was not unique, but shared the feeling of most of the nation. When so many others in England were over-confident, it is not surprising that Kipling was too, for he had never been even faintly pacific; it is therefore not necessary to explain his "war-mongering," as Wilson does, by referring it to the Balestier episode. When the War came, he learned that England was not all he had thought — or that she was what he had thought in 1890, not in 1897. He was bitterly disappointed and even infuriated by England's poor showing in the field. Later, when he had come to consider the significance of this showing, he perceived that England faced a new era: that the relative security and stability of the Victorian era were gone and that an age of anxiety had begun. Whether or not the War was directly responsible for changes in his personal outlook, he emerged from the War years a sobered and a humbled man, conscious that the first part of his life was over and that the second would be significant, if at all, in a different way. But he had not lost his capacity for sympathy and gratitude where he thought them due: toward the soldiers of the "people's army" he showed these feelings so generously that they constitute a new phase of his attitude toward the common man of England. And though he had lost confidence in England's future, he had not lost interest either in England or in the Empire. After the War, however, he withdrew noticeably from public affairs. Partly as a solace for his disappointments and partly as a stimulus to his imagination, he turned to Sussex, where "Bateman's" and its surroundings brought him into touch with the past. Moved at this time chiefly by the picturesque charm of the countryside, of its native inhabitants, and of its history, he came only

later to a more profound appreciation of its past and its present. His turning to ancient Sussex and to England's history appears to have been a turning away from contemporary England's plight and shame, a turning away from the anxiety which he felt whenever he contemplated her decadent vulnerability. His study of history seems to have consoled him by allowing him to live again the days of England's greater glory; but he never lost interest in the condition of contemporary England, and he remained an active critic of current affairs.

VITA

Donald Louis Hill was born July 10, 1914, in Poughkeepsie, New York. He was graduated from the public schools of Oneonta, New York, in 1931. In 1933 he entered Hartwick College, graduating with a B.A. degree in 1937. He received the M.A. degree in English at Syracuse University in 1939, and in that year he was appointed a graduate assistant in English at the University of Illinois. In September, 1942, he took a position in Washington, D.C., as a civilian with the United States Navy. He resumed graduate work in September, 1945, at the University of Illinois.